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## Priced out of education

Though many college graduates in Rhode Island end up leaving the state because of the high cost of living, rising tuition costs may start forcing them out before they even receive their degrees if state officials don't step in soon.

The Board of Governors for Higher Education approved a tuition hike last week that drove up costs yet again for the state's three institutions of higher education. The increase, which will take place during the 2008-09 school year, will add hundreds of dollars to the bottom line of an education that is already costly to those attending the schools – the ones who are often paying off that debt for a decade or more.

And, the situation might only get worse. Frank Caprio, chairman of the board, told the Providence Journal that tuition costs will continue to increase unless the state steps in to help saying that state aid to the institutions has not kept up with the costs associated with running them. For instance, the state funded 42 percent of the University of Rhode Island's budget just 14 years ago, while funding figures for this year only has the state supporting 27 percent of the university's budget.

This is simply not acceptable. We understand that the state is staring down the barrel of a fiscal crisis, but education has to be a priority as we move forward to guarantee that a large segment of the population isn't left behind in the rapidly evolving

job market. While there are plenty of people willing to take on a 10-year (or more) loan to pay for their education, there are some who simply can't.

If the colleges – which include Rhode Island College and the Community College of Rhode Island – are going remain public schools and receive public funds, then they need to be available to the public, and the fact is that some students are going to find themselves priced out sometime in the near future.

The public is usually the first to step forward and support education initiatives when asked. Bond referenda over the past four years to add biotech and pharmacy facilities to URI's Kingston campus have passed muster. So, when it comes time for our legislators to step forward and divvy up the available money each year, why does education seem to be taking a back seat?

Life is full of tough decisions, and our General Assembly will certainly be facing some of them this winter during the state budget process. With a deficit projected at more than \$100 million and a shrinking property tax cap, belts will certainly have to be tightened. However, it shouldn't continue to be at the expense of higher education. Like public safety, education is something that should be benefiting all of Rhode Island's residents, not just those who can already afford to go anywhere they want.